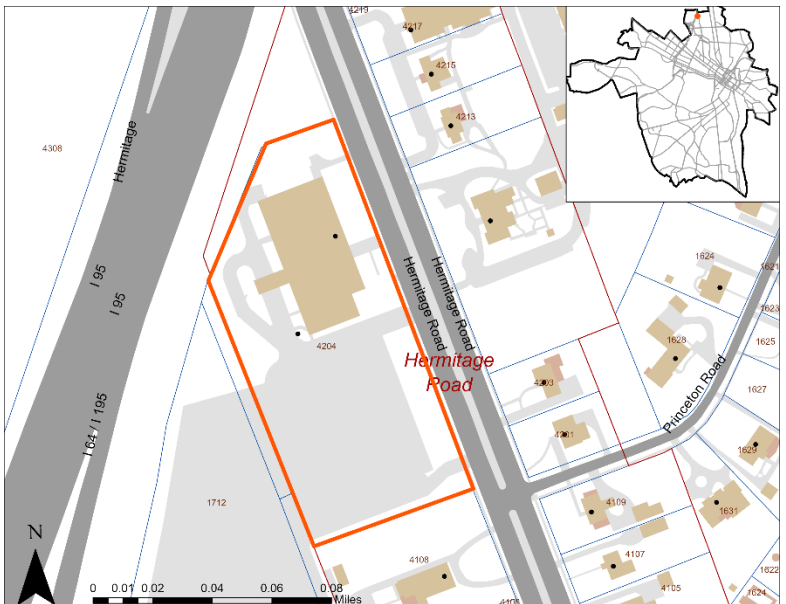




Commission of Architectural Review

8. COA-169086-2025	Conceptual Review	Meeting Date: 7/22/2025
Applicant/Petitioner	Catherine Easterling	
Project Description	Modify exterior features of an existing non-contributing building, and construct a new rear addition.	
Project Location		
Address: 4204 Hermitage Road		
Historic District: Hermitage Road		
High-Level Details:		
<p>The project proposes an adaptive reuse of the building previously known as the Scottish Rite Temple, and involves exterior modifications and site improvements to the large mid-century institutional building that is considered non-contributing to the Hermitage Road National Register Historic District.</p> <p>The rehabilitation includes replacing the existing signage at the front of the building, adding decorative cresting and symbols to the cornice and roofline, modifying the shape of the entrance arches, wrapping the thin mushroom-shaped columns with a reversible material and connecting columns with a garland feature, and painting the brick masonry.</p> <p>A new addition is proposed to the rear of the site, and will potentially be connected to the existing building.</p>		
Staff Recommendation	Approval, with Conditions	
Staff Contact	Yara Iwaz, Yara.Iwaz@RVA.gov, (804)646-6031	
Previous Reviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none">June 1990: The Commission approved the addition of a childhood language center to the rear of the buildingNovember 2007: The Commission approved the installation of a free-standing sign on the property.	

Staff Recommendations	<p>Staff recommends approval of the proposed exterior modifications and addition, with the following conditions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the continued use of the non-contributing building for an institutional/religious purpose as this ensures its long-term maintenance and activation • Approve the proposed addition as it is appropriately scaled, located at the rear, and aligned with the 1990s addition; maintain the proposed siting and subordinate relationship in future submissions • Staff recommends preserving the original unpainted brick as one of the few features linking the building to the surrounding district • Decorative elements (cresting, arches, and columns) are compatible, clearly differentiated, and reversible. Staff recommends approval of the design direction, with final drawings and details to be submitted in future phases. • The selected neutral tones and finishes are compatible with the building and the district; Staff recommends maintaining the proposed color scheme and submitting final samples for staff review. • Staff recommends submitting detailed drawings showing profiles, attachment methods, and final dimensions of column wrapping to demonstrate reversibility and proportions • Approve the freestanding sign design as submitted.
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Staff Analysis

<p>The subject property is located between Hermitage Road the Richmond-Petersburg Turnpike, at the northwestern edge of the Hermitage Road Old & Historic District. The district itself is characterized by large detached Queen Anne-style residential estates.</p> <p>The building was constructed in 1969 and underwent a one-story addition in the 1990s, and features a distinctive modernist aesthetic with textured brick panels, cast concrete details, and a flat roof. Sanborn maps do not indicate that any other building or structure occupied the site prior to 1969, and city assessor cards show a building permit issued in 1968.</p> <p>The building is surrounded by institutional structures, including the Acca Shrine Temple to the southwest and the New Community School to the east, and is visually buffered from nearby residential properties by mature landscaping and distance. Its orientation, scale and architectural style make it a unique case within the historic district.</p>		
Guideline Reference	Reference Text	Analysis
The Secretary of the Interior, Standards for Rehabilitation, page 4	<i>1. A property shall be used for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment.</i>	The Mandir reuse proposal supports the goal of continued occupancy, which can help ensure the building's long-term viability while retaining its core massing and architectural rhythm from 1969. The new institutional/religious use would enable continued maintenance and activation of a non-contributing resource. The changes accommodate a new community use while avoiding demolition or vacancy.

		<u>Staff recommends supporting the maintained active use of the building, and encourages continued sensitivity to material compatibility and public-facing elevations.</u>
Standards For New Construction (Including Additions, Siting, Page 46	<i>1. Additions should be subordinate in size to their main buildings and as inconspicuous as possible. Locating additions at the rear or on the least visible side of a building is preferred.</i>	<p>The proposed addition is placed at the rear and aligns with the footprint of the 1990s addition. It is clearly subordinate in height and massing. This siting approach reinforces the hierarchy between old and new and avoids overwhelming the existing building; while the materials of the addition appear to be visually compatible with the primary building on site, the addition presents a distinguishable architectural expression.</p> <p><u>Staff supports the scale of the addition and, recommends that the setbacks and siting of the addition be maintained in future submissions.</u></p>
Paint, Historic Masonry, page 63	<p>1) <i>Do not paint historic brick or stone masonry that has not previously been painted. Painting previously unpainted masonry is historically inaccurate and is not permitted. Property owners who wish to remove paint from masonry should work with a qualified contractor knowledgeable in the use of non-abrasive cleaners.</i></p>	<p>The proposed scope includes painting portions of the original unpainted brick masonry. While the selected neutral color may appear compatible with other buildings in the district, the brickwork is one of the few character-defining features that visually relates the building to the district. Painting would obscure its texture and alter its original material integrity.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends maintaining the unpainted brick finish. Preserving the brick in its current condition would ensure the limited material compatibility this building has with the surrounding historic district.</u></p>
The Secretary of the Interior, Standards for Rehabilitation, page 4	<p>3. <i>Each property shall be recognized as a physical record of its time, place and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or architectural elements from other buildings, shall not be undertaken.</i></p>	<p>The introduction of ornamental elements (roof decorative cresting, simplified arch forms, column treatments) appropriately differentiates the new function of the building, while also remaining consistent with the existing materials and colors. Additionally, these elements are reversible and do not replicate character-defining historic detailing from the district, therefore avoiding false historicism.</p> <p>The existing emblems on the building's entablature align with the columns and help define the rhythm of the elevation; the proposal aims to replace the emblems rather than remove them, which would help maintain the elevation pattern and visual balance.</p> <p><u>Staff supports the proposed design approach as a clearly differentiated and legible update. Final designs for ornamentation and structural treatments should be submitted with future phases.</u></p>
Standards for New Construction, Materials & Colors, Page 53	<p>2. <i>Materials used in new construction should be visually compatible with original materials used throughout the surrounding neighborhood.</i></p>	<p>The proposed color palette (including painted surfaces, smooth stucco finishes, and muted neutral tones) maintains compatibility with the historic district's material character. While the building is non-contributing, the selected tones avoid visual disruption and allow the façade to blend more subtly</p>

		<p>into the surrounding context. The consistency of finishes between the 1990s addition and the newly updated areas also contribute to a cohesive visual presentation.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends maintaining the proposed neutral color scheme, and providing color samples in future submissions.</u></p>
The Secretary of the Interior, Standards for Rehabilitation, page 4	<p>9. <i>New additions, exterior alterations or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.</i></p>	<p>The wrapping of existing columns and application of façade alterations are presented as reversible interventions, which is an appropriate treatment for historic or context-sensitive properties. The application does not yet provide detail on how the proposed column cladding will be installed, the method of attachment, or how the new materials will interface with existing surfaces.</p> <p>Staff recommends that these elements be clarified to demonstrate reversibility and to assess the physical and visual impact on the existing building.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends providing clear documentation of profiles, fastening methods, and overall depth to better represent how the wrapped columns will remain proportionally appropriate.</u></p>
Standards for Signage, page 74	<p><i>Freestanding Signs. Located in front of buildings and set back from the street, these signs are generally seen on residential structures that have been converted to commercial use, but are acceptable signs for any commercial property and include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Post-top Signs mounted to posts or other supports.</i> • <i>Monument Signs ground-mounted with a ground clearance of eight (8) inches or less.</i> • <i>Hanging Signs suspended from braces, beams or other supports connected to a freestanding pole.</i> 	<p>The proposed signage is a freestanding-style sign located within the landscaped setback and will not be attached to the building façade, using colors and materials that are consistent with the building's intended use and existing appearance. It is of modest height and will not be internally lit.</p> <p><u>Staff recommends approval of the proposed freestanding sign as submitted.</u></p>

It is the assessment of staff that, with the conditions above, the application is consistent with the Standards for Rehabilitation and New Construction outlined in Section 30-930.7 (b) and (c) of the City Code, as well as with the Richmond Old and Historic Districts Handbook and Design Review Guidelines, specifically the pages cited above, adopted by the Commission for review of Certificates of Appropriateness under the same section of the code.

Figures



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

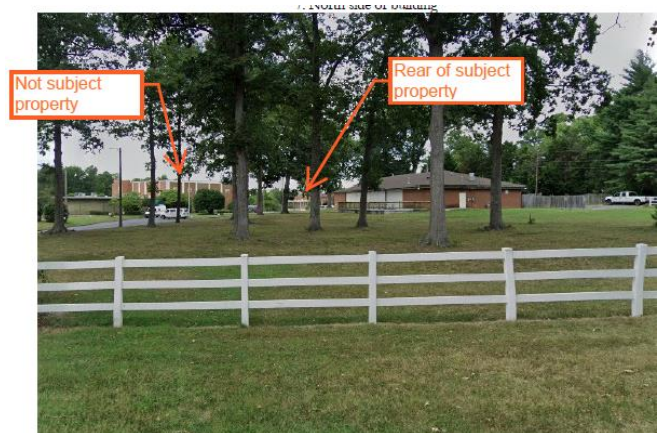


Figure 4: view from Bellvue Ave



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9

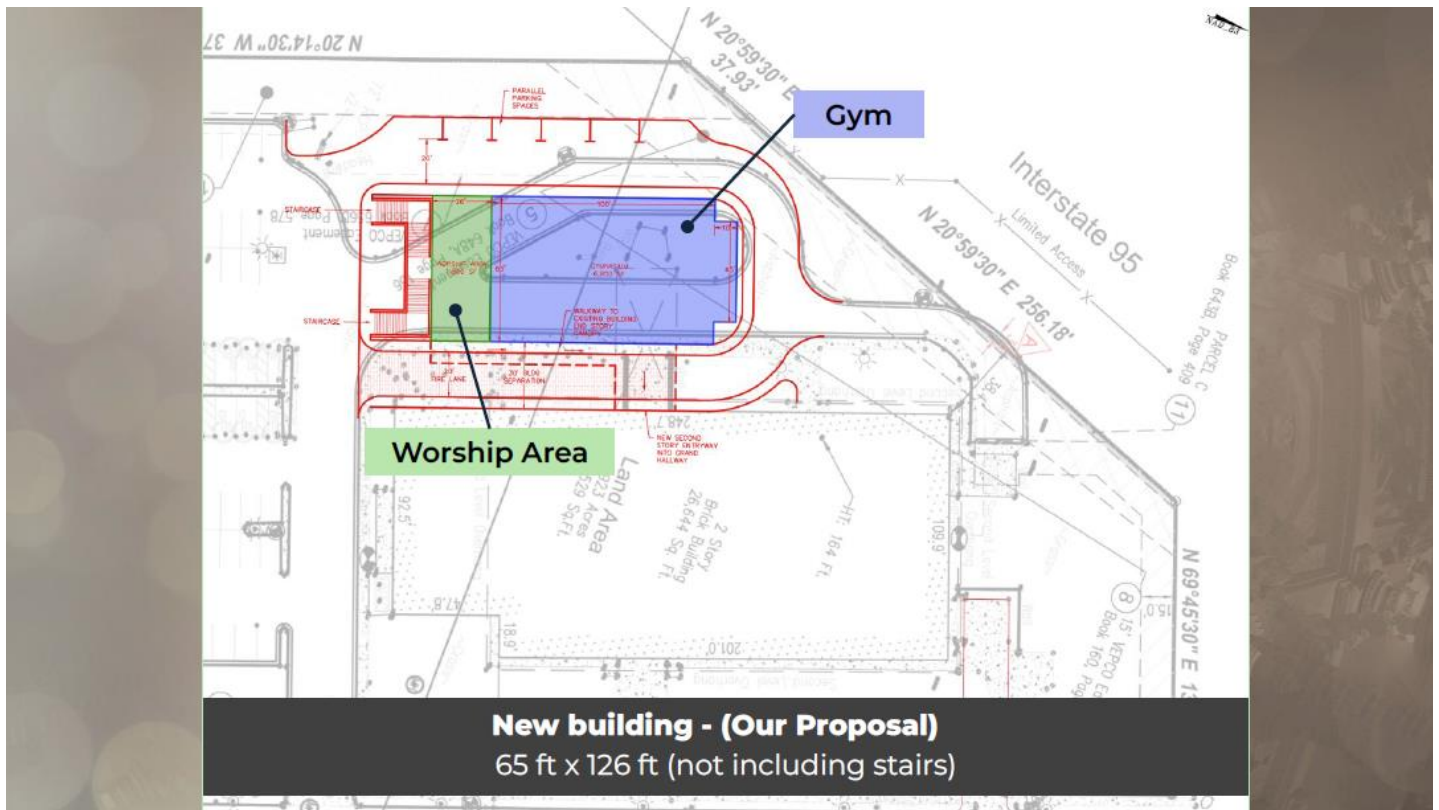


Figure 10



Figure 11